

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Hebrews 4: 12-16

Jesus, One of Us: Participating in God's Mercy and Grace

October 14, 2012

The writer of Hebrews begins with sobering words

– there is no place to hide from God

– “everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

How we view God depends upon our gut reaction to this statement:

Do we cower or stand in defiance: seeing God as a hard-line judge, or

Do we worship God: seeing God as One to whom all is visible and so yield ourselves to God's mercy and grace.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to worship God and does so by talking about Jesus as our great high priest.

Now we don't have high priests today – they do not run for election, nor does the president appoint high priests,

But we read in 5:1 that “every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin.”

Jesus, however, is no ordinary high priest – he is a “unique high priest.”

When I first began meeting in a local coffee shop up in Lake Villa for *sacred space*, I talked about Jesus through a song by Joan Osbourne:

If God Was One of Us

Joan Osbourne

If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to his face
If you were faced with him in all his glory
What would you ask if you had just one question

And yeah yeah God is great yeah yeah God is good
yeah yeah

What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home

If God had a face what would it look like
And would you want to see
If seeing meant that you would have to believe
In things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets

And yeah yeah god is great yeah yeah god is good
yeah yeah

What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home
He's trying to make his way home
Back up to heaven all alone
Nobody calling on the phone
Except for the pope maybe in rome

And yeah yeah God is great yeah yeah God is good
yeah yeah

What if god was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home
Just trying to make his way home
Like a holy rolling stone
Back up to heaven all alone
Just trying to make his way home
Nobody calling on the phone
Except for the pope maybe in rome

Some might consider this song sacrilegious; others might find comfort in the idea of God becoming or being “one of us”

When the writer of Hebrews talks about Jesus as a “great high priest” we may think that Jesus is being talked about in a lofty manner,
– removed from our lives, removed from our reality
– like many do imagine Jesus
– “since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess” (Hebrews 4:14).

Lofty images have little to do with God; that is not the God of Scripture.
– that has been the problem with our understanding the things of God
– and also our problem of experiencing the presence of God, who engages us in the midst of the earthiness and ordinariness of our lives.

And so before we go on thinking about Jesus as this high priest who is
– way up there
– far removed from us
– not touched by the earthiness of life – relegating faith to some ethereal category
– **the author of Hebrews brings us down to earth, revealing that Jesus is down to earth (where we are).**

The writer wants us to see Jesus in all his fleshy humanness, in all his earthiness, or as Joan Osborne puts it, “a slob like one of us.”

The writer expresses: For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are . . .”

After Neil Armstrong died, I found myself one night outside looking up at the moon – I remembered the moon landing and his first steps on the moon back in 1969.

I watched the whole thing.

And as I looked up at the moon, I imagined a conversation Neil Armstrong may have had with people as they shared what they had accomplished in life.

While one might say they summited Mt. Everest, another was in the depths of the Mariana Trench, I imagine Armstrong pointing at the moon – so far, so pristine – and saying, “I walked on that”

When we think of Jesus, we may often look heavenward, but if we listen to Jesus, we hear him saying to us,

“I walked on that” indicating the world on which we exist;

“I walked with humanity;”

And the reality is, Jesus still walks with us through the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus is one of us

– he not only hung out with us

– he experienced what we go through – all the things that tempt us to gratify ourselves,

- to make a name for ourselves,

- to shape our own lives,

- to lust after passions

– all these things Jesus experienced, God experienced

– God who became one of us, “a slob like one of us”

The text says, Jesus was just like one of us – “yet he did not sin” – ooh that “sin” word

So, how could he be one of us if he did not sin?

Well, he was like one of us when he took on our broken humanity – as Paul says in Romans 8, “God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity.”

He was like one of us when he had the same temptations to sin as we do

– but when it says, he did not sin – we have a hard time with Jesus, that he really does not get us.

But he does, and for us to understand this, we need to understand something about sin:

It is not necessarily what we think

– we often talk about it in behavioral ways

– doing something we shouldn’t be doing, or even not doing what we should be doing

– Paul struggles with this a bit in Romans 7.

But that is not what “sin” is.

Misdeeds, inaction, wrong actions are merely the consequence of sin.

Sin has to do with alignment, with allegiance.

When we refuse to give allegiance to the American flag, or the American way of war, we are “sinning” against the flag, against America. What greater American sin is there than not believing in America.

Likewise, sin is aligning ourselves with the non-reign of God, the ways of the world
– with which we are just too become comfortable.

When the writer of Hebrews, states, Jesus did not sin, he was not saying he was less than human
= what the preacher is stating is that Jesus, even in the midst of all his human temptations, **did not betray his allegiance to God, he did not give allegiance to the non-reign of God,**

Jesus always aligned himself and gave allegiance to God’s reign in all he was and did, even in the midst of being tempted.

So in light of this reality – Jesus is the sole human being who lives giving allegiance to God and God’s reign;

And as we identify with him, attach ourselves to him by believing him, giving ourselves to him, we are saved, re-created, set free to embrace God and to give allegiance to God;

Left to ourselves, we will always run from God; but in being radically attached, radically connected to Jesus, we are enabled to give allegiance to God as Jesus does because Jesus’ Spirit dwells in us.

As I mentioned last week – atonement – how we are restored to our relationship with God – is more than the cross of Jesus, **Jesus is our atonement – his life, ministry, death, and resurrection.**

And we are enabled to live in allegiance to God because in committing ourselves to Jesus, we are empowered by the Spirit of Jesus, of God, to live in allegiance to God as Jesus lived in allegiance to God
– it is only in and through Jesus we are able to be set free from all which misaligns us with God

In being rooted in Christ Jesus, there is also a deeper, ongoing present reality that embraces us as a community

– as the missional people of God, we not only continue the ministry of Jesus – but we also, as the body of Jesus, **challenge and support each other so that we might live lives which give allegiance to God and God’s reign.**

You ask, how?

What are ways we can go about enabling allegiance to God and God’s reign in our lives?

Well, just as God did this by “checking in” with us by becoming human; we do this by checking in with each other . . .

One way to do this . . .

- is to enter into spiritual conversations with one another
- one on one, small groups
- in which we remind each other
- encourage each other
- refocus, re-rhythm one another
- to help each other live in allegiance to God and God’s reign

This is a work of the Spirit in us.

We can check in with one another, simply by calling one another

- for us to become a calling community
- to check in with each other during the week, beyond Sundays.

“Checking in” with one another is a way we express stubborn loyalty to one another as community – “I am here for you!” “I will not let you go!”

As you check in, listen to and give heed what things the Spirit brings to your awareness.

Our checking in is not merely for social conversation, it is for spiritual conversation.

As each of us helps one another to walk in Christ’s ways, to live in allegiance to the purposes and mission of God

I believe we will be amazed at how such a simple act of “checking in” helps each of us to live in allegiance to Christ and his reign.

It is not only about Jesus becoming one of us and identifying with us,

But as the body of Jesus,

- we identify with another in being a community,
- we are here for one another in community,
- we remind one another of to whom we give allegiance

– all this then enables us to *boldly*

“approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our times of need”